

**SAWIN HOUSE STUDY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES MAY 19 2015**

**DLOTT MEETING ROOM TOWN HALL**

**7:00 – 9:00 PM**

**APPROVED**

PRESENT: Stephen Evers, Randy Johnson, Elissa Landre, Mike Linehan, Jan Parsons, George Sawin, Ken Soderholm, Wayne Szretter, Amy Ward, Jim Williamson.

ABSENT: Chris Milford, John Moran, Steve Roche.

Meeting called to order at 7:08 PM by Chair Ken Soderholm

Review by Chair of the Town Meeting Session during which Article 36 was voted on. To questions asked by Town Meeting member Peter Golden regarding archeological studies of the site, consultation with Native Americans or consultation with academic historians, Mr. Soderholm responded that faculty from UMass Boston were in communication with Mass Audubon and were considering a proposal to do work at site; that other interested parties are welcome to attend meetings, be recognized and comment. They need to be on the agenda if they wish to make a presentation.

MINUTES from April 7, 2015. Motion to accept minutes by Mr. Linehan, second by Mr. Williamson. Approved by unanimous vote.

Chris Milford proposal about a website for Town History, including references and links to information about Thomas Sawin. Tabled because of Mr. Milford's absence from meeting.

Consideration of letter from Ms Landre about misinformation which she felt had been stated over the course of meetings and invitation to tour the sanctuary with her to get full picture of how Broadmoor Sanctuary operates. She has been there 32 years.

The Chair suggested we take some time to share our thoughts and opinions at this point in the process. Where are we and where do we want to be? He has a goal of finishing major work by the end of June. He envisions three more meetings, either including or in addition to tonight.

Mr. Johnson: looking at where we are with consensus: there are a lot of opinions that have not changed since the first meeting. Recognize that now instead of trying for consensus. May need two types of reports. There will be a minority report.

Mr. Sawin: Wrap up by end of June. Not anticipating consensus from the group.

Mr.Evers: Have probably lost the house that succeeds the original house and its meaning to the community.

Mr.Williamson: Is it worth preserving and how to do it? Recognizing the historical significance and ways it can be preserved as meaningful: contents, house preserved as a shed. No one will come up with 800K to preserve it. Would like to see stairs and dated stone preserved in footprint of house.

Ms. Ward: focus on report. Accept that it will have differing viewpoints. We have a broad charge and few resources. Need more than Plan A and Plan B. Have an outline of report and take up two pieces a week. Develop an outline.

Ms. Landre: Mass Audubon wants resolution and final report of the Committee. Will wait on any action until the report is done. No decisions until report is received. The process has raised visibility about Broadmoor and all of South Natick. There will be much more history and interpretation in the future. Mass Audubon will work on interpretation and make the history of the land more visible.

Mr. Linehan: for Fall Town Meeting, wrap up in June. Easy to get caught up in details. Conclusion is important. Make a decision tree. What are options? For example: deconstruction and storage allows future activity.

Ms. Parsons: thinking has changed. No longer in favor of having more than a shell on site. The artifacts can go elsewhere to be preserved and the site memorialized in some way. For people born during or before WWII, experiencing something tangible in person has been essential. For many younger people a virtual world is as meaningful as the real thing. We can document and catalog the historical parts of the Sawin house and make it continue to be “accessible” through the internet or at an offsite location.

Mr. Soderholm: No longer likely that the Natick Historical Society supports preserving the house. It’s either lost or needs to be moved. The opposition to Shaw Park showed all the regulatory and legal hurdles involved. Need complete consensus to get the state legislature to act. NHS needs space. Must be in the area of the museum. However, these opinions came from an informal discussion with NHS board members, and was in the context of Shaw Park. No formal vote has been taken by the Board of the Historical Society, whose members are waiting for recommendations from the SHSC report to be completed.

Mr. Sawin: find a way to preserve the house enough in place to keep it at present location.

Mr. Soderholm It can be stabilized for fifty years but if it is not occupied, it won’t stand up. Even if fully restored as a saltbox, it would need an endowment. He is working with a client who wants an historic house removed in Dover. The clock is running on the one year demolition delay. If no one takes it, it will go into a dumpster in January. People do not have an interest in old houses right now. The historic parts of the Sawin House would not fill more than ½ a trailer. It will be possible to catalog the house and document the archival history. The work of this Committee will be important. The profile of the house and family has been raised. It will be positive in the long run.

M. Ward: huge fundraising process needed by Sawin family.

Mr. Johnson: important to figure out the parameters of funding by the Massachusetts Historical Preservation Commission. Need a solid proposal by a viable organization with a funding plan.

Mr. Szretter: There are issues of access, building codes, liability. There are many barriers to this source of funding. This is not an idea worth pursuing. It is no longer likely there is a sponsor, as NHS has lost the will to pursue Shaw Park.

Mr. Sawin: The owner should undertake the project and do the funding. Their mission should include historic properties.

Mr Johnson: as part of the report, the Committee should endorse the principles of the Community Preservation Act.

Mr. Evers: If the CPA article had passed Town Meeting a few years ago, CPA could have contributed the funds to preserve the house. There may be an opportunity to vote on CPA again in a few years.

Chair: Mr. Johnson wants to discuss archeological aspect of the Sanctuary. Mr. Johnson: an archeological exploration would be very exciting. It would bring academic energy to the site, with graduate students and knowledgeable staff. The faculty member contacted has a real interest in Christianized Indians.

Ms. Landre: the Sanctuary was the site of Archeological digs in the 60s and 70s. Those reports are on file with the state Archeologist. She referred the professor from UMass to these reports. A few arrowheads were found. Digs disturb natural sites. A dig would have a big impact on the land of the Sanctuary. It would take an investment by UMass Boston to explore the site.

Comments by others: The site will be memorialized, however we choose to make that meaningful. The site will be kept pristine with the land, trees and sawmill areas preserved. If that choice is made, Mass Audubon will bear the cost of demolition. Significant and historic items will be removed. The site may be investigated but the owner will be a passive participant. The UMass faculty has other digs going on. What will the parameters be? Who is the champion? UMass is **not** the champion. Who will define what UMass can do?

Mr. Soderholm: seems to be a disconnect between perceptions of Mr. Johnson and those of Ms. Landre.

Need to have a proposal made to Mass Audubon to be reviewed by their scientist. Fine to have a site visit from UMass Staff to prepare a proposal. This may move the proposal along. Ms. Landre expressed a willingness to reengage with UMass and see what their thinking is at this point.

Mr. Soderholm: we have heightened awareness of our history. The Historical Commission can impose a six month delay ordinance. Gives six months to find an alternative to demolition.

Ms. Ward: There needs to be a section in the report that cover public notices, such as requirement to provide public notice before demolition.

Mr. Evers: the state archeologist is already aware of this site. If needed plywood will be laid out and accepted techniques employed to preserve an archeologically significant site.

Mr. Evers: as the owner himself of an historically significant home, he knows the special costs involved. Has a photo compilation of the parts of the building. No one will rebuild it if it burns down. Too expensive to rebuild. Requires special, very expensive insurance.

Review of Mr. Sawin's options for the house: First: Do Nothing.

Issues: The insurance company or the Town could insist on demolition. An old abandoned house on a back street becomes vulnerable. It is an "attractive nuisance." Ms. Landre: There are wells, utilities, electricity from inverters on solar panels going through the house. There are safety issues.

Chair: Covered a lot of ground tonight. At the next meeting, come with a focus for the report. Start writing it. We will take votes as we go along.

Mr. Szretter: Do we have costs for memorializing site?

Mr. Soderholm: Do we as a committee think the Town should take on some costs?

Meetings to be scheduled for May 26, June 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, at Town Hall or Community Center.

Motion to adjourn at 8:50 by Mr. Linehan. Second by M. Landre. Vote - unanimous.